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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 000379

SIPDIS

LONDON, PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [DJ](#) [PDEM](#)

SUBJECT: POSSIBLE CREATION OF A 10TH POLITICAL PARTY?

Classified By: Pol/Econ Erinn C. Reed for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Pol/Econ received a courtesy call on April 12th from Ahmed Idriss, President of the Movement for Equality and Liberty (MEL), a political party in the process of forming. MEL has apparently tried to form a legal, recognized party in 2002 but was turned down. Idriss stated that he sent a letter regarding the party's new request for official recognition on January 3, 2005 to the Procurer of the Republic and received an "okay" for creation of the party after elections. Idriss said the party has also submitted an application for the right to publish a journal. He did not say when official recognition of the party was supposed to be granted. Idriss said the party will hold preparatory congresses soon to attract members from the country's population.

2. (C) He explained that he was calling on the Embassy to establish contact with the Embassy, to give the U.S. political knowledge of the party and to ask for U.S. assistance in the political development of Djibouti. Idriss said the party's goal was not to align with the government or the opposition, but to be a third, independent voice in Djiboutian politics. He stated the political platform of the party is to install political freedom, economic security and social equality. In response to Pol/Econ's question as to how the party aimed to accomplish this task, Idriss said the road to these goals was long and required small steps. First, the people must talk amongst themselves and be aware of the political process. Second, the government must consult with the people before making laws. Idriss also commented the political system inherited from colonialism has been a major obstacle to the development of Djibouti. He said the system should be changed, but it cannot change all at once.

3. (C) Pol/Econ asked what Idriss thought were the three most vital changes needed for the political development of Djibouti. Idriss said 1) There must be participation and an opening of the political system without conditions; 2) There must be an organization to help reintegrate people into the economic system, thus preparing for modernization and globalization; and 3) There must be freedom of the press which reflects the positions of Djiboutians.

4. (C) Comment: Pol/Econ was particularly struck by Idriss's absolute refusal to have any conversation with Embassy FSNs. At first, the meeting included FSN Econ Assistant as note taker and translator if needed, as is normal for many first-time meetings when it is not known if French or Somali is preferred by the visitor. Idriss balked at the idea of having a Djiboutian not from his own party be translator. He said if a translator is needed, he would call someone from his party that knew English very well. After Econ Asst left, Idriss was very open about everything to do with his party and even his tribal origins. At the end of the meeting, Pol/Econ thanked Idriss for the visit and commented in passing that she could be reached at the Embassy or a message could be left with her staff if she was not in. Again Idriss refused all contact with Embassy FSNs saying, "There is no reasons to create intermediaries between us, if we meet again I will contact you directly or you may contact me. I would also ask that all further meetings not be held at the Embassy."

5. (C) Comment cont.: Suspicion of fellow Djiboutians of other clans is the norm in Djibouti, but the level shown by Idriss is surprising. Many opposition members have told us they are continually followed, but still prefer to hold meetings in the Embassy, where they know they can speak freely. Others have told us they believed some FSN members are spies for the Government of Djibouti. Still, Idriss's reaction is puzzling given that political contacts from the opposition or any other party have not had a problem in general being contacted by Embassy FSNs to set appointments, even when they meet with Embassy Americans alone.

6. (C) Comment cont./Bio data: Ahmed Idriss is an Issa from the sub-clan Horone. According to Idriss, the Horone are known as fishermen and fish sellers and inhabit the southern coastline of Djibouti. This sub-clan is known by other Issas to be more independent, difficult to deal with and to have problems with all other Issa sub-clans. This characterization might account for Idriss's refusal to speak with Embassy FSNs. Pol/Econ does not yet have much information on Idriss's background or party, but will continue to follow whether the

party he described is officially recognized and the extent of
its membership. End Comment.
RAGSDALE